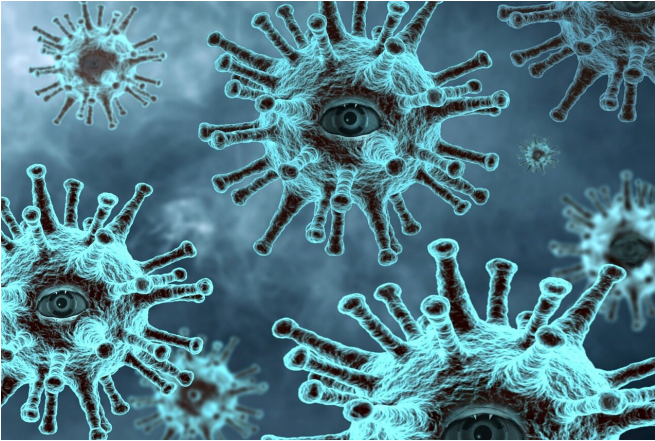


China rushes to stamp out virus outbreak in city of 11 million

6 January 2021



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Travel has been restricted in a northern Chinese city of 11 million as authorities Wednesday moved to snuff out a COVID-19 cluster, while health officials in another province detected a new virus strain found in South Africa.

Ten major highways leading into the city of Shijiazhuang, around 300 kilometres (200 miles) south of Beijing, have been closed and a bus terminus was also shut in an attempt to prevent the virus spreading beyond the city in Hebei province.

There have been 117 cases in the city—including at least 63 more reported Wednesday—78 of which were asymptomatic, prompting mass testing across the affected area.

The same day, health authorities in southern Guangdong province reported a case involving a mutant virus strain found in South Africa.

The strain detected in China was isolated from a swab of a South African pilot who had entered the province in December and tested positive for COVID-19, said the Guangdong Provincial Center

for Disease Control and Prevention.

Its announcement comes days after China confirmed its first case of a new coronavirus variant detected in Britain, prompting widespread concern as both strains are said to be more infectious.

Unlike much of the world, China has largely brought the virus under control through strict lockdowns and travel restrictions.

But there have been a series of local outbreaks in recent weeks, prompting mass testing and targeted lockdowns.

The village of Xiaoguozi within the city boundary has been classified as a "high risk" district and sealed off.

Health authorities said all 40,000 residents in that district have been tested for the virus.

State TV showed villagers being tested by staff in full hazmat suits and protective wear, with roadblocks staffed by police and medical workers.

All schools in Shijiazhuang have been closed.

State broadcaster CCTV showed teams of health workers spraying disinfectant across streets and said an emergency team of medical workers had been sent to the city.

More than 400,000 residents of another nearby city, Nangong, have also been tested, authorities said.

Beijing is also racing to vaccinate millions ahead of the Lunar New Year travel rush next month.

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